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AN ASSIZE
SERMON,

Preached at

GUILDFORD in *SURREY*,

August 23, 1754.

By THOMAS TURNER, M.A.
Curate of DORKING.



*The Sacred Nature of an Oath, and the great
Sin of Perjury.*

AN ASSIZE
S E R M O N,

Preached at

GUILDFORD in SURREY,
August 23, 1754.

Before the Right Honourable

Sir DUDLEY RIDER, Knt.

Lord Chief Justice of all ENGLAND;

And the Honourable

Mr. Justice FOSTER.

By THOMAS TURNER, M.A.
Curate of DORKING.

Published at the Unanimous Request of the HIGH-SHERIFF
and the GENTLEMEN of the GRAND-JURY.

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And to the Honourable

E D W A R D B O S C A W E N, Esq.

And the other Worthy Gentlemen of the
G R A N D - J U R Y for the County of
Surrey.

G E N T L E M E N,

I Am extremely sensible of the great Honour done
me by the favourable Sentiments you expressed
of this Discourse, and have complied with your
Request in publishing the same; hoping the Im-
perfections that may appear in it upon your more
serious Perusal, will find the same candid and po-
lite Treatment as the Author met with when at
Guildford.

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I think I need not make any Apology for troubling the Publick with it, since I have the Honour to say it is done in Obedience to a Set of Gentlemen that come behind none in Loyalty to their King, in Love to their Country, and in endeavouring to promote the Happiness of every Individual. I am,

GENTLEMEN,

Your Obliged, Obedient,

Humble Servant,

Sept. 3, 1754.

THOMAS TURNER.

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DEUT. vi. 13.

*Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve him,
and shalt swear by his Name.*

ONE great Excellence and Recommendation of the Precepts of Holy Writ, is that they directly tend to the Glory of God, and the Good of Man. The better they are observed, the more these great Ends are promoted. And were they universally followed, the supreme Being would be always honoured, and revered, and Mankind made as happy as the present Condition of their Nature would admit of.

All Deviations from these divine Rules are a Dishonour to the Almighty, and the certain Causes of Misery to ourselves. But to fear the Lord is the Beginning, nay the Perfection of Wisdom, and to serve him the Road to Happiness. By fearing and serving the Lord, Men do the wisest and best Thing in the World; They promote God's Glory, and their own Happiness together.

But

But how shall we account for what follows in the Text, "That swearing by his Name tends like-
" wise to the same Ends?"

Perhaps this may be accounted for by shewing,
The Sacred Nature of an Oath.

It's Lawfulness.

And that it is a most solemn Act of Religion,
bringing Glory to God, and Benefit to Man.

As also by shewing

The great Sin of Perjury.

It's blasphemous and provoking Nature with
Respect to God.

And how hurtful it is to Man, and Society in
general.

An Oath is the most solemn Appeal to God that we can possibly make. The Nature of an Oath is, " That we thereby call upon God to witness to " what we promise, or what we assert." We not only appeal to the Almighty as a Witness, but challenge him as an Avenger, and a Judge if we speak falsely. An Oath, therefore, is one of the most serious, and sacred Things in the World. For every one that swears is supposed to address himself to God in some such Terms as these:

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O ALMIGHTY LORD, I am here called upon to give my Testimony before Men, that cannot see the Secrets of my Heart, so must be incompetent Judges of my Sincerity; I therefore appeal to Thee, O God, who art the Searcher of all Hearts, and from whom no secret Thought is hid (for thou art omnipresent, thou art omniscient, thou art God,) I therefore call Thee to Witness, that I sincerely speak Truth in this Matter. I call Thee, not only as my Witness, but my Judge and Avenger, if I speak falsely. And I do earnestly pray, that according as I deal truly, or falsely in this Thing, so thou mayest deal with me both here and for ever, O LORD, Amen.

Such is the true Meaning, and sacred Nature of every Oath that is taken.

The Lawfulness of taking an Oath appears from it's being used by the best Men, on solemn Occasions, in all Ages of the World. The ^a Patriarchs, the ^b Prophets, ^c St. Paul, Our ^d Blessed Saviour when on Earth, nay, the ^e Angels and God ^f him-

^a Gen. xxi. 24. xxxi. 53. l. 25. ^b 1 Kings. i. 29. xviii. 15. 2 Kings. ii. 6.
^c 2 Cor. xi. 31. Gal. i. 20. ^d Matt. xxvi, 63, 64. ^e Rev. x. 5, 6.
 Dan. xii. 7. ^f Gen. xxii. 16. Numb. xiv. 21. Jer. xxii. 5.

self are our Warrant and Example. Those Texts of Scripture that seem to forbid all manner of Swearing, when duly considered and rightly understood, will be found to discourage and forbid only, swearing by any Creature, or in common Discourse, or upon unnecessary and frivolous Occasions; implying that an Oath is too serious and sacred a Thing to be trifled with, and thrown out at Random.

That our Saviour never intended to forbid absolutely the using of an Oath upon any Account whatsoever, appears from hence, viz. That the same Paragraph, wherein he says, "Swear not at all," concludes thus, "but let your Communication, "the Communication of your Thoughts to, your "common Conversation with, one another, be yea "yea, nay nay;" plainly confining what he had said before to our common and ordinary Discourse.

Matth. v. 33 to 38. And that we may be assured that this was his Meaning, He himself, when the High Priest called upon him to swear whether he were the Christ or not, refused not to do it. The High Priest said unto him, "I adjure thee by the "Living God that thou tell us whether thou be the "Christ the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou "haft said." *Matth. xxvi. 63, 64.* But sure it may

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save the Trouble of labouring this Point, if it be presently shewn that an Oath seriously taken upon necessary and weighty Occasions, is not only lawful, but is a most solemn Act of Religion, bringing Glory to God and Benefit to Man.

It brings Honour and Glory to God, as it expresses the firm and pious Persuasion we entertain of some of the chief Attributes of the Deity. It argues great Faith in the Supreme Being, particularly a Belief of his Omnipresence and Omniscience. By this appealing to him we admit and declare that he is every where present, that he knoweth all things, that the most secret Acts are open and manifest to him ; that there is not a word uttered with our Tongue, nor a Thought conceived in our Heart, but he knoweth it altogether ^u. We express a Confidence in his Providence, watching over our inmost Thoughts, hearing what we say, and seeing what we do. We shew our firm Belief in his Justice and Fidelity; that we are persuaded he is a great Lover of Truth, and an undeniable Patron of Right; but that he is a swift Witness against Falshood and Insincerity, and a most sure and severe Avenger of all Iniquity.

^u Psal. cxxxix. 2, 3.

SWEARING then in it's own Nature is a very religious Act, and as such enjoined us in the Text and other Places of holy Writ. "Thou shalt fear "the Lord thy God and serve him, and shalt SWEAR "by his Name." And again, "Him only shalt thou serve, to him shalt thou cleave, and shalt SWEAR "by his Name. Deut. x. 20. And in the lxiii. Pfal. "All they that SWEAR by him shall be commended." And we need not be surprized at this; since when it is "done with that Seriousness and Solemnity, "which become so special a Part of Devotion, for "Reasons that require, and in Matters that excuse, "our engaging the Almighty as a Witness, we by "thus appealing to God by an Oath do honour "and glorify his holy Name, as much as by Prayer, "or Praise, or any other Act of religious Worship "whatsoever."

It not only brings Glory to God, but is of great Use and Benefit to Man.

An Oath is of great Use and Service for determining Matters in Dispute, for the ending of Differences between one Man and another, for finding out the Truth to the utmost Certainty, for the clearing of the Innocent, for convicting the Guilty, and for binding Men by the strictest Tie to

some particular Duties. In these and many other Instances Oaths become necessary. And as they are the most certain Pledges, the very utmost Assurances Men can possibly give of their Faith and Sincerity, they cannot be without their Use and Benefit. They are the Sinews of Government, the most sacred Bands of Society. Our Lives, our Liberty, our Property, and Religion are defended and secured to us by Oaths. In short, our Peace abroad and Safety at Home are guarded and assured to us by the same sacred Ties. And as long as they are kept inviolable, we shall continue to be a secure, flourishing, and happy People; the best Sovereign blessed with faithful Allies and loyal Subjects, and good Subjects remaining easy and happy under the best of Kings.

Of such Use, Benefit, and Security are Oaths reverently taken, and religiously observed.

But I hasten to the other Part of this Discourse, in which is to be shewn,

The great Sin of Perjury.

Its blasphemous and provoking Nature with Respect to God.

And it's Hurtfulness to Man, and Society in general.

Perjury

Perjury or swearing falsely is a Sin of that complicated Guilt and Magnitude as hardly to be paralleled. 'Tis calling the God of Truth to bear Witness to a Lie. 'Tis interesting the Almighty, as far as we can, in the Defence and Attestation of that, which he above all things abhors ; than which there cannot be a more blasphemous and provoking Affront. It argues a Person to be of the most desperate and abandoned Principles. It shews either rank Infidelity or the most daring Presumption. A Man must either think wickedly that there is no God, or else (if there is) that he is such a one as himself, false and deceitful, and an Encourager and Protector of those that are so, before he can be guilty of this Sin. Or else he must yet more absurdly think, that God is a Being not to be feared or regarded, how highly soever he is affronted and provoked. This implies the very Summit of Wickedness, and expresses such an Audaciousness to, and Contempt of the Supreme Being, as cannot otherwise be expressed. To tell a Lie to the very Face of Omnipotence and Truth, and to call upon God to observe it, and to be a Witness to his own Dishonour, and to our daring Impiety, is a Sin beyond Expression black.

The

The Guilt of other Sins generally makes Men bashful and shy, and to use all the little Artifices they can to hide their Transgressions from God and the World; at least to stifle and suppress the Thoughts of a divine Presence, to forget that God is by and beholds their Sin. But the False-Swearer without Fear or Shame rushes into the Presence of God, stares the Almighty in the Face, and with the most consummate Impudence affronts his Majesty, renounces his Mercy, puts him to open Defiance, and as it were bids him do his worst.

Such is the blasphemous and provoking Nature of Perjury with Respect to God.

The Hurtfulness of this to Man lies upon the Surface. It requires no Depth of Thought to describe, or Strength of Memory to recollect it's pernicious Nature and Effects. The Life of the Innocent, and the Property of the Secure, have been sacrificed to the perjured Villain.

An ignominious Death has been the Fate of One, and Indigence and Misery the hard Fortune of another.

But the False-swearer is not only injurious and an Enemy to this or that particular Person, but to Society in general. He does what in him lies to undermine

undermine and subvert all publick Peace, Justice, and Security. In short, He is the worst Subject, the most dangerous Neighbour, the greatest Pest of Society, the most pernicious Creature that can breath upon Earth. Solomon truly says, “ that a “ false Witness against his Neighbour is a Maul, “ and a Sword, and a sharp Arrow.” Prov. xxv. 18. Intimating, I suppose, that amongst all the Instruments of Ruine, Mischief and Cruelty, which have ever been devised by Man, none is of more pernicious Consequence to Society than Perjury and Breach of Faith. ’Tis a Pestilence that walketh in Darkness; a secret Stab, against which there is often no Possibility of Defence.

Whether the Laws in Force against this infamous Crime are severe enough, does not come within my Province to determine. But this I can assure Offenders of this kind, that how light soever their Punishment is in this World, it will be sufficiently heavy in the next.

Let us close the Whole with hearing what the Holy Scripture says in this Matter.

“ God will not hold him guiltless, that taketh
“ his Name in vain.” *Exod. xx. 7.*

"A False Witness shall not be unpunished,"
Prov. xix. 59.

And again, "A Curse shall enter into the House
 " of the Thief, and of him that sweareth falsely by
 " the Name of God." *Zech. v. 4.*

" And may God of his Mercy grant that what
 we hear with our Ears, may duly affect our Hearts,
 and excite us at all Times to fear the Lord, and
 serve him ; and that whenever we SWEAR by his
 Name, we may do it as the Prophet directs,
Jerem. iv. 2. in Justice, and Judgment, and Truth,
 to the Benefit of Man, and to the Glory of God,
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord." *Amen.*

F I N I S.



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